infinitum LEADERSHIP

The Story Only You Can Tell

Write Your Story: narrative identity, private writing, and the final instrument of Choose Becoming

Jonathan Evans, MA, PCC, MCS
Executive and Leadership Coach
Infinitum Leadership

White Paper · November 2026

Write Your Story is the final instrument in the Choose Becoming sequence, Infinitum Leadership's five-instrument development program for executive leaders.

Executive summary

The earlier instruments of Choose Becoming measure a leader's present state, build a plan, track weekly behaviour, and surface the mindset patterns that interfere. None of them asks the integrative question: what does this life, taken whole, mean — and what story is it becoming? **Write Your Story** is the program's answer, placed last in the sequence by design. In three movements — *The Story So Far*, *The Story You're Living*, *The Story You're Choosing* — the client writes their life into chapters and turning points, examines the strengths and costly patterns they are living now, and authors the future in concrete, lived detail. A one-page distillation of that work feeds back into the Becoming Plan.

The module's defining commitment is privacy: **the story content is never visible to the coach**. Entries live in the client's own private account; the coach sees completion and word counts, nothing more. This paper argues that the privacy is methodological, grounded in the disclosure literature's own moderators, and states the trade-off it creates for safeguarding, with the structural answers the design gives.

The paper is equally direct about the evidence's limits. Expressive writing's measured effects are small — a meta-analytic r of .075 across 146 randomised studies (Frattaroli, 2006) — and the best recent estimate for depressive symptoms is null (Reinhold, Bürkner and Holling, 2018). Write Your Story is therefore presented as what it is: developmental authorship work inside a coaching program, justified by the narrative-identity literature and by design reasoning, never as a health intervention.

1. The capstone problem

McAdams' life story model describes personality at three levels: dispositional traits; characteristic adaptations — goals, strivings, defences, coping patterns; and narrative identity, the internalised, evolving story a person constructs to give their life unity and purpose (McAdams, 2001; McAdams and McLean, 2013). A review in *Personality and Social Psychology Review* found that narrative identity predicts well-being beyond traits and situational variables, with the strongest evidence for agency, redemption, and integrative meaning — on correlations the review itself characterises as modest (Adler et al., 2016). A program that works seriously at the first two levels and never touches the third leaves the integrating layer of identity to chance. Write Your Story exists to give that layer deliberate, structured attention. It completes the earlier instruments; it replaces none of them.

The occasion for the work. Narrative identity work also has a season in a leader's working life. Leaders in macro role transitions — promotions, exits, restructures, the move from operator to enterprise leader — do this work whether it is guided or not: identity in transition is constructed narratively, story by story, as the old role loosens and the new one is tried on (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). Those transitions are when executives most often engage coaching, and they are the moments when an unguided story gets written by circumstance. The module is placed where that season usually arrives in a coaching engagement — after the leader holds current-state data, a working plan, and a behavioural rhythm — so the story is authored deliberately, from evidence, at the moment it is most in flux.

2. The module

Movement 1 — The Story So Far. The writer divides their life into roughly five or six self-named chapters, each written at length: what happened, how it felt, what it formed. Two turning points are required, a third optional — moments after which things were different. Three closing writes separate the layers of the account: *Tell it plainly* (the facts in order, as the writer can best reconstruct them, with interpretation held back), *What it made of you* (strengths, sensitivities, reflexes), and *The themes you see* (recurring threads and lessons). The confirmation copy closes the movement on the module's promise: the story so far is written, and it stays yours.

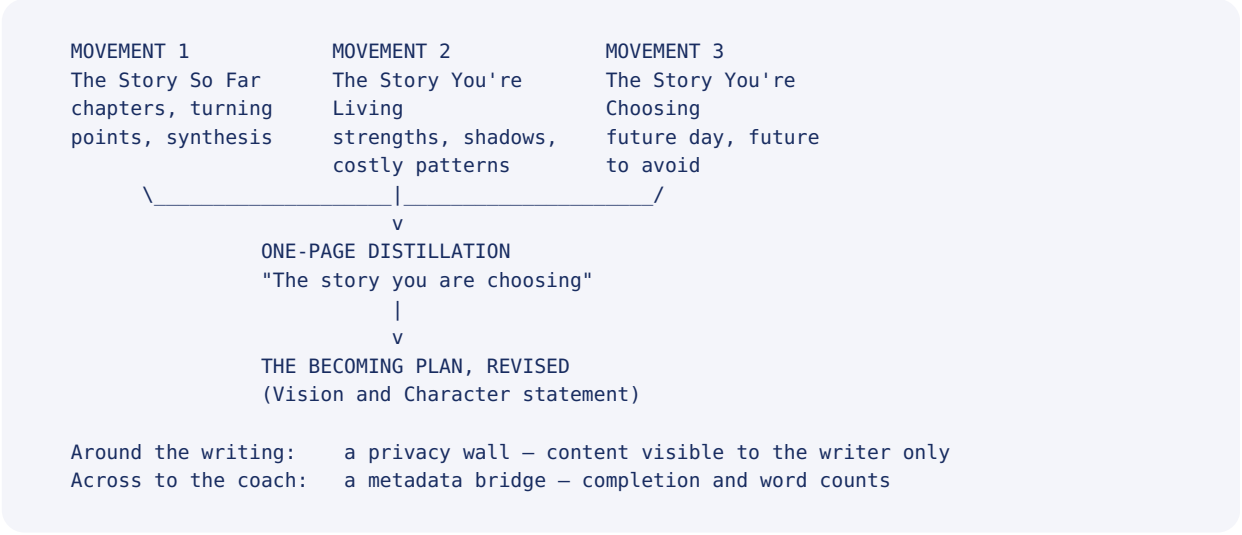
Movement 2 — The Story You're Living. Fifty statements of observable behaviour across five families — Energy and people; Curiosity and mind; Discipline and follow-through; Steadiness; Warmth and candour — are gathered as raw material and stated, in the module's own words, to carry no scores. From them the writer ranks their five strongest patterns and works each through a loop: a time the strength carried them; its shadow, where it runs too hot or costs them; and one deliberate use in the next ninety days. A mirror bank of hard-week behaviour statements produces the three patterns that cost the most, worked through the same honest loop: where it shows up, what it costs, what it protects or avoids. A single closing paragraph names the story being lived.

Provenance of the fifty statements. The statements were written for this module, in plain behavioural language, and the five families were chosen to cover where a leader's patterns actually show up at work: with people, in thinking, in execution, under pressure, and in candour. The set conceptually neighbours the character-strengths tradition (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) while sampling observable workplace behaviour rather than virtues, and it adopts no proprietary inventory, taxonomy, or scoring. The construct it samples is deliberately modest: the writer's own reading of their recurring behaviour, gathered as raw material for authorship.

Movement 3 — The Story You're Choosing. Eight two-minute unedited warm-ups loosen the hand. The main write is fifteen unedited minutes inside an ordinary day three to five years from now — lived from within, in concrete detail. Its counterpart follows: the future to avoid, five years on if nothing changes, closing on what that future asks the writer to face while facing it is still cheap. The movement ends in a one-page distillation, *The story you are choosing*, built to travel: it feeds the Vision and Character statement of the Becoming Plan, and the writer keeps the page as their own. Section 8 sets out the distillation page's structure.

The privacy architecture. All three movements require login, support save-and-continue across sittings, send no notifications, and store entries as the writer's own drafts. The coach sees progress metadata only — completion and word counts. An employer sponsor, where an employer funds the engagement, receives less than the coach: completion status at the program level, and nothing else — no content, no word counts, no themes. The prompt structure is described in this paper; client story content is never used, in any form, anywhere.

Figure 1 — The module's architecture.



3. The evidence base

Narrative identity. The three movements mirror the definition of the construct itself: narrative identity integrates a reconstructed past with an imagined future (McAdams and McLean, 2013), with Movement 2 holding the present as the hinge. The generativity research adds a directional finding relevant to a program for leaders: in a study of forty highly generative adults against thirty less generative adults, the highly generative told life stories organised by a commitment script — early advantage, sensitivity to others' suffering, redemption of bad scenes into good outcomes, and future goals aimed at benefiting others (McAdams et al., 1997). Movement 3 writes toward that territory without prescribing its shape.

Life review. Movement 1 descends from the life review tradition (Butler, 1963). A meta-analysis of 128 controlled reminiscence studies found structured life-review formats outperformed simple reminiscence, with moderate effects on ego-integrity, purpose in life, and mastery (Pinquart and Forstmeier, 2012) — which is why the movement is chaptered, turning-pointed, and closed with synthesis rather than left as open remembering. Meaning-making in turning-point narratives is independently linked to identity maturity (McLean and Pratt, 2006). The transfer limit is stated in Section 6: that evidence rests largely on older and clinical samples, and it is used here for structure, not for outcome promises.

Expressive writing, with its honest numbers. The paradigm's founding study is Pennebaker and Beall (1986). Its popular reputation rests on Smyth (1998), whose d of 0.47 came from thirteen studies. The mature record is Frattaroli (2006): 146 randomised studies, an overall effect of r = .075, with publication bias inflating published estimates. Reinhold, Bürkner and Holling (2018) found no significant long-term effect on depressive symptoms. This paper cites Smyth only to retire the number. What the Frattaroli record does support, robustly, is design intelligence — the moderators of Section 4 — and format plausibility for structured, repeated, directed writing. The module borrows the paradigm's format for a developmental purpose the clinical literature does not test, and its claims are sized to that sentence.

Possible selves and future-self writing. Movement 3 operationalises Markus and Nurius (1986): the hoped-for self (the main write), the feared self (the future to avoid), and the bridge to action (the

distillation into the Plan). The same research program supplies the condition that makes the bridge load-bearing: possible selves impel action when they are linked to plausible strategies and felt as congruent with who the person already is (Oyserman, Bybee and Terry, 2006). The distillation exists to perform exactly that linkage, carrying the imagined future into named commitments inside an existing plan. The writing format has direct experimental support from its origin study — participants who wrote about their best possible future self across four twenty-minute sessions reported raised subjective well-being, found the writing significantly less upsetting than trauma writing, and showed less illness five months later (King, 2001). It now has meta-analytic support as well: across 29 studies with 2,909 participants, the Best Possible Self intervention produced small-to-moderate gains in well-being (d+ = .325) and larger gains in positive affect (d+ = .511) (Carrillo et al., 2019). The vividness instruction has its own experimental cousin: rendering the future self more vivid changes present behaviour, demonstrated in savings decisions with age-progressed renderings of the writer's own future face (Hershfield et al., 2011) — which is why the module's instruction is to live a day inside the future rather than summarise one.

The fantasy objection, answered. A skeptical reader will raise the strongest counter-literature here, and the paper raises it first. Across four populations, vividly indulging a desired future predicted *less* effort and worse outcomes (Oettingen and Mayer, 2002); the mechanism is lowered energization — the indulged future is partly consumed in advance, and the body stands down (Kappes and Oettingen, 2011). Movement 3 is built against that failure mode. The lived future is written in a pair: its counterpart, the future to avoid, is written immediately after, at equal length and in equal detail, so the exercise runs as contrast rather than indulgence — the desired future read against the cost of standing still. The distillation then carries the contrast into the Becoming Plan, where commitments acquire owners, dates, and the if–then planning of the Plan instrument. The claim made here is a design claim, stated at that weight: the module's structure supplies the obstacle-and-strategy contrast the fantasy literature identifies as the difference between imagery that energizes and imagery that sedates.

Narrative coaching. The coaching-specific evidence is thin, and this paper declines to thicken it. The re-authoring posture descends from narrative therapy (White and Epston, 1990) — a genealogy the paper names because Section 5's coaching–therapy boundary is drawn against it. Narrative-collaborative coaching has one small randomised trial — Stelter, Nielsen and Wikman (2011), seventy-seven young athletes in a group format — within a largely practitioner literature (Stelter and Law, 2010; Drake, 2018). The module's justification is assembled from the adjacent, stronger literatures above, each used for what it can bear, with program reasoning labelled as reasoning wherever the chain reaches it.

4. Methodology: the design commitments and their grounds

Why the module sits last. Integration requires material: a story written before a client holds current-state data, a working plan, a behavioural rhythm, and a map of their mindset patterns would be written from impression alone. Sequenced last, the story is written from the program's accumulated evidence about the person — and its distillation then revises the Plan, making the sequence a loop rather than a ladder. Timing evidence supports the patience: in Adler's (2012)

longitudinal study across psychotherapy, increases in narrative agency *preceded* improvements in mental health across twelve time points; story change unfolds with support and time. Depth ordering also carries a safety rationale, set out with its evidence status labelled in Section 5.

Why chapters and landmarks. The module's unit of organization — the self-named chapter, bounded by turning points — has a mechanism in the temporal-landmark literature. Landmarks such as new years, birthdays, and fresh starts spur goal initiation by creating psychological distance from the past self and opening a new mental-accounting period (Dai, Milkman and Riis, 2015). Cited carefully, that finding supports the module's premise: a writer can re-enter their own story from a new chapter position, reading the earlier chapters at the distance a landmark creates. The citation carries initiation and distance only. It says nothing about therapeutic outcomes, and the governing numbers for any outcome claim in this paper remain the expressive-writing record of Section 3. The transition chapters — moves, role changes, losses, the pivots where the story turns — have a scholarly neighbour in the habit-discontinuity evidence: when context changes, established habits loosen and behaviour and self-definition are at their most open to revision, an effect demonstrated in a field experiment with 800 households, where a behaviour-change intervention proved significantly more effective among recent movers and the window lasted roughly three months (Verplanken and Roy, 2016). The module's design intuition — that a life's transitions are the natural places to examine and re-author it — is consistent with that evidence. The paper labels the connection an analogy: the discontinuity research concerns behaviour change at relocation, and it is borrowed here as design reasoning, with the borrowing disclosed.

Why 'plainly' does not promise 'archival'. Movement 1's first closing write asks for the facts in order, no interpretation. The paper is precise about what that instruction can mean. Autobiographical memory is reconstructive: each recall is rebuilt within the self-memory system rather than replayed from an archive (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce, 2000), and the field distinguishes narrative truth — the account as the teller can honestly assemble it — from historical truth, the independently verifiable record. The module works in narrative truth and says so: *Tell it plainly* asks the writer to hold interpretation back and give the events as they can best reconstruct them, because the separation itself is the discipline — verdict first is how a story hardens. The developmental value of the work does not depend on archival accuracy, and no claim in this paper treats a client's chapters as a factual record of anything beyond the writer's own account.

Why the coach never sees the content. The meta-analytic record points one way: in Frattaroli (2006), disclosure completed alone in a private room showed larger effects than disclosure in public settings ($r = .085$ vs $.034$), and disclosure at home outperformed controlled settings for psychological health ($r = .122$ vs $.034$). Audience changes disclosure experimentally as well: visually anonymous communication produced significantly higher self-disclosure than face-to-face exchange, with public self-awareness cues suppressing it (Joinson, 2001) — the mechanism Suler (2004) theorised as benign disinhibition. A coach who will read the text is an audience, and an audience edits. The program's own frame completes the argument, labelled here as program reasoning: a story written to be read is partly performed, and Choose Becoming's through-line is *end performing, choose becoming*. Metadata suffices for the coaching function — engagement, sequence, volume — and the coaching conversation works with what the client chooses to bring, the distillation page having been designed for exactly that voluntary sharing.

What the coach is for. Every buyer asks the question this design invites: if the coach never reads the story, what is the coaching fee buying? The answer has three parts. First, the distillation: the client brings the one page they chose to write for travel, and coaching is where that page is tested — against the Plan it revises, against the calendar, against the behaviour the Weekly Check-In records. Second, the pattern across instruments: the coach holds the Snapshot, the Plan, the Check-In rhythm, and the Mindsets map alongside the story work, and the story's themes are examined where they intersect commitments the coach can see. Third, accountability and pacing: the metadata bridge tells the coach the work is happening, where it has stalled, and when a check-in is owed (Section 5). The writing is the client's instrument; the coaching is where its products are cashed into decisions and followed through. The delivery vehicle itself carries meta-analytic support: across five outcome classes, coaching's effects run from g = 0.43 to 0.74 (Theeboom, Beersma and van Vianen, 2014). The paper cites that record for the coaching, and the smaller record of Section 3 for the writing, and keeps the two apart.

Why this dosage. Frattaroli (2006) found most effective protocols used three or more sessions, that sessions of at least fifteen minutes performed better overall, and that specific, directed instructions outperformed generic ones for psychological health. The module's chapter minimums, extended turning-point writes, structured prompt sequences, save-and-return design, and timed unedited exercises are engagement scaffolding informed by those moderators. They are not validated clinical thresholds, and nothing clinical follows from meeting or missing them. The return rhythm has a second, quieter anchor. A regular writing practice is itself a behaviour to be formed, and the module's design follows the formation literature's anchoring protocol: attach the new behaviour to existing routines and stable contexts, and repeat it in the same context until it runs more automatically (Lally and Gardner, 2013). Formation timescales in the current systematic review vary widely — medians of 59–66 days, with an individual range of 4–335 days (Singh et al., 2024) — so the module sets sittings and minimums as scaffolding across an open-ended writing season and claims no formation timeline of its own.

Why nothing is scored. Narrative identity research measures its constructs through trained coding of interviews — a research method, not a coaching deliverable — and the coaching literature is far too thin to support scored interpretation of a client's story. Movement 2 therefore states plainly that there are no scores, and the module makes no measurement claims about content it never sees.

5. Standards and scope: coaching, held apart from therapy

Write Your Story is a coaching instrument for functioning adults. It does not screen, diagnose, or treat any condition; it is not therapy and not a trauma intervention. Its prompts invite reflection; none requires disclosure of traumatic material, and none asks a writer to relive an event in sensory detail.

The module's trauma-informed commitments follow SAMHSA's (2014) framework, mapped to the design. **Safety:** the writer works alone, in their own account, at their own pace; nothing is timed except Movement 3's future-focused exercises. **Trustworthiness and transparency:** the privacy

rule is stated in plain language before writing begins, and the metadata the coach can see is disclosed rather than hidden. **Peer support** is met at program level through the coaching relationship; the paper names that as an adaptation rather than claiming the instrument provides it. **Collaboration and mutuality:** the writer controls depth throughout — the third turning point is optional, chapters may be revisited or left thin, and the distillation is shared only by the writer's choice. **Empowerment, voice, and choice:** the writer names their own chapters, selects their own turning points, ranks their own patterns, and authors the future text; no template of a good story is supplied or scored. **Cultural, historical, and gender issues:** because no story shape is prescribed, culturally varied narrative forms are not corrected toward a redemption template the literature itself flags as culturally situated; the scholarly depth behind that position is the master-narrative framework, which reads personal stories against the cultural templates available to the teller and protects the legitimacy of alternative narratives (McLean and Syed, 2015).

Sequencing as preparation — the safety rationale, with its evidence status. Section 4 claimed a safety rationale for placing the deepest writing last; the argument belongs here. By the time a writer reaches Write Your Story, three preparations are in place: an established coaching relationship with months of history; practised self-observation, built by the Weekly Check-In's rhythm of noticing and recording; and a named map of the writer's own mindset patterns, from The Mindsets in Your Way, including the patterns most likely to be activated by autobiographical material. The design intent is that a writer meeting difficult chapters does so with support already standing and with practised capacity to notice their own state. The evidence status is stated plainly: this is risk-management reasoning at the level of program design. No trial tests instrument sequencing as a safety intervention, Adler's (2012) timing evidence comes from therapy and concerns agency rather than safety, and the paper claims preparation — a reasonable, argued design posture — rather than protection.

The duty of care the metadata carries. The referral triggers below depend on what a client reports in conversation. The design also gives the coach one honest signal of its own: engagement. An abrupt stop partway through Movement 1's turning points, after steady progress, is visible in exactly the metadata this paper describes, and the practice treats it as a care signal. The standing protocol: the coach initiates a personal check-in within two working days of such a stall, framed openly as care — the client knows from the module's entry framing that engagement patterns prompt exactly this kind of check-in, so the contact arrives as the disclosed design working, with no content accessed and nothing inferred beyond the stall itself. What the client then chooses to share governs what happens next, under the referral boundary below.

Data governance. The paper states the governance in the same plain terms as the architecture. Story entries are stored as drafts inside the client's own account on the Choose Becoming platform; the practice keeps no copy of story content outside that account — no exports, no coach's files, no parallel record. The coach's systems hold engagement records only: dates, completion status, word counts. Retention follows the writer's ownership: the writing remains available to the writer in their account, the writer may download it at any time, and when an engagement ends the client may request deletion of the account and its contents, which the practice carries out and confirms; engagement records are retained under the practice's ordinary record-keeping obligations and contain no story content. The practice is a British Columbia practice and handles personal information under BC's *Personal Information Protection Act* (PIPA),

with the federal *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* (PIPEDA) applying where it governs. One limit is stated without decoration: no privacy design can promise that stored writing could never be legally compelled, and a client for whom that possibility is decisive should know it before they write. What the design does promise — no coach access, no sponsor access, no secondary use — is within the practice's control, and the practice answers for it.

Accessibility and modality. The module asks for sustained writing, and the paper states the position plainly. Writers may dictate: speech-to-text on the writer's own device produces text inside the same private drafts, under the same privacy rules, and counts identically. Sittings are self-paced throughout; Movement 3's timed exercises are a writing aid, and a writer may take the same prompts untimed. Where extended writing in any modality is a barrier — injury, motor limitation, a second language at full stretch — the honest answer is that this instrument may not fit, and the coaching conversation becomes the route for the same work, at whatever pace the medium allows. That is a stated limit of the instrument, recorded here rather than discovered by a client mid-program.

Practitioner assurance. The paper's author practises under the International Coach Federation's Code of Ethics (International Coach Federation, 2020), holds the PCC credential in good standing, and works within a professional supervision arrangement. Concerns about the work route first to the practice directly and, unresolved, to the ICF's ethical review process — the structure that converts a solo practice from a personality into an accountable one.

Because safety cannot depend on coach monitoring — the coach cannot see the content — the module carries its own signposting: entry framing that names the coaching–therapy boundary, explicit permission to pause, skip, or stop, and crisis and therapy referral information inside the module itself. The referral boundary is raised from conversation and engagement, never from unseen content: persistent or worsening distress connected to the writing, trauma symptoms the client reports, complicated grief, or any disclosure of abuse or of risk. Crisis presentations follow the practice's standing protocol — in Canada, call or text 988 for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline; 911 for emergencies. Two evidence-based cautions anchor the boundary: brief self-directed expressive writing should not be promoted as a standalone response to depression (Reinhold, Bürkner and Holling, 2018), and disclosure writing in the immediate aftermath of acute trauma, before stabilisation, is cautioned against in the paradigm's own literature (Frattaroli, 2006; Baikie and Wilhelm, 2005).

Claims discipline. The module makes no post-traumatic growth claims and keeps no growth scores. The measurement critique is decisive — perceived growth and measured change are different things (Frazier et al., 2009; Infurna and Jayawickreme, 2019) — and a program that cannot see the writing has no business scoring the writer's growth in any case. The work is described as meaning-making and direction-setting, which is what it is.

6. Limitations

1. **Expressive writing effects are small, and for depression the best recent estimate is null** (Frattaroli, 2006; Reinhold, Bürkner and Holling, 2018). The module is not presented as a health intervention; its claims are developmental — authorship, integration, direction.

2. **The narrative-identity evidence is correlational.** Agency, redemption, and meaning themes associate with well-being; with the partial exception of Adler's (2012) longitudinal timing evidence inside therapy, causation is not established. Redemption is also partly a North American cultural script; the module neither teaches nor scores any preferred story shape.
3. **Adjacent literatures carry transfer limits.** Life review rests on older and clinical samples; future-self writing's origin studies rest on undergraduates, though the meta-analytic record now spans 29 studies and wider samples (Carrillo et al., 2019); the one narrative-coaching trial rests on young athletes. Each is used for format, plausibility, and existence — and no further.
4. **Narrative coaching as a named method has almost no outcome evidence.** One small trial and a practitioner canon. The justification here is assembled from adjacent literatures, and the paper says so rather than borrowing authority the coaching literature has not earned.
5. **The module itself is unevaluated as an intervention.** No trial of Write Your Story exists. Its design commitments are evidence-informed; its outcomes are a program-evaluation question.
6. **Character minimums are scaffolding, not validated thresholds.**
7. **The privacy trade-off is a genuine limitation.** A coach who cannot see content cannot detect distress from the writing. Section 5 exists because of this limit: the module's deepest writing arrives after months of coached self-observation, its signposting is internal, and the residual risk is the disclosed price of the privacy that makes the writing honest.

7. What would strengthen the evidence — and what will be reported

A program-evaluation agenda that respects the privacy architecture: engagement and completion metadata; program-level client-reported outcomes measured outside the module; voluntary qualitative interviews about the *process*, never the content; and longitudinal follow-up on Plan adherence after the distillation revises the Becoming Plan. For a sponsoring organization, that agenda becomes a reporting commitment with the same boundaries as the design: sponsors receive completion and engagement reporting at the program level, client-reported outcome results in aggregate, and the evaluation findings as they mature — and no content, no word counts, and no individual story material, at any point, under any framing. No promised metric outruns the privacy architecture; an evaluation that required reading the writing would dismantle the condition that makes the writing work. Until that record exists, the claim stands at its earned size: identity has a narrative layer; structured, private, well-sequenced writing is a defensible way to work on it inside coaching; the evidence supports the design's shape and disciplines its claims.

8. Working with Write Your Story

Who it serves. Leaders in or approaching a transition — a new role, a larger mandate, an exit being prepared, a career being re-founded — who are already working inside Choose Becoming. The module is the sequence's final instrument and is reached inside a Choose Becoming engagement; it is not sold on its own, because the story it asks for is written from the instruments that precede it.

What the client receives. Their own completed writing, held privately in their account; the coaching work around it described in Section 4; and one tangible artifact — the distillation page.

Anatomy of the distillation page. The page is a structure, and its words are always the writer's own; what follows is its anatomy, the shape every writer's page takes:

- *The chosen day, compressed* — the ordinary future day from Movement 3's main write, distilled to the scene that anchors it: where the writer is, what the work is, who is there.
- *The future refused* — the future to avoid, stated in its costs, kept on the page as the standing contrast.
- *What the story asks now* — the commitments the contrast produces: what gets faced while facing it is still cheap, carried into dated, owned actions.
- *The Vision and Character wording* — the sentences the page contributes to the Becoming Plan, where the distillation takes up residence and the story starts governing a calendar.

What a sponsor receives. Completion status at the program level and the aggregate evaluation reporting of Section 7. Nothing else, as Section 5 states.

The next step. Write Your Story is one instrument in a five-instrument program; its companion papers — on the LEADS-based leadership assessment, the Ad Infinitum Loop, the Quarterly Snapshot and Becoming Plan, and The Mindsets in Your Way — are published together on Infinitum Leadership's evidence page for exactly the reader this paper was written for: the skeptic who checks. Leaders considering the work, and the HR partners who sponsor it, are invited to a discovery conversation with the author before any engagement is proposed.

About the author

Jonathan Evans is an executive and leadership coach in Vancouver, British Columbia, and the founder of Infinitum Leadership. He coaches senior leaders — including health-system executives — through transition, and he designed Choose Becoming, the five-instrument program this paper accompanies. He holds a master's degree and the PCC credential, with a specialization in mentor coaching.

References

Adler, J.M. (2012) 'Living into the story: Agency and coherence in a longitudinal study of narrative identity development and mental health over the course of psychotherapy', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(2), pp. 367–389.

Adler, J.M., Lodi-Smith, J., Philippe, F.L. and Houle, I. (2016) 'The incremental validity of narrative identity in predicting well-being: A review of the literature', *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 20(2), pp. 142–175.

Baikie, K.A. and Wilhelm, K. (2005) 'Emotional and physical health benefits of expressive writing', *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, 11(5), pp. 338–346.

Butler, R.N. (1963) 'The life review: An interpretation of reminiscence in the aged', *Psychiatry*, 26(1), pp. 65–76.

Carrillo, A., Rubio-Aparicio, M., Molinari, G., Enrique, Á., Sánchez-Meca, J. and Baños, R.M. (2019) 'Effects of the Best Possible Self intervention: A systematic review and meta-analysis', *PLOS ONE*, 14(9), e0222386.

Conway, M.A. and Pleydell-Pearce, C.W. (2000) 'The construction of autobiographical memories in the self-memory system', *Psychological Review*, 107(2), pp. 261–288.

Dai, H., Milkman, K.L. and Riis, J. (2015) 'Put your imperfections behind you: temporal landmarks spur goal initiation when they signal new beginnings', *Psychological Science*, 26(12), pp. 1927–1936.

Drake, D.B. (2018) *Narrative coaching: The definitive guide to bringing new stories to life*. 2nd edn. Petaluma, CA: CNC Press. [Practitioner literature]

Frattaroli, J. (2006) 'Experimental disclosure and its moderators: A meta-analysis', *Psychological Bulletin*, 132(6), pp. 823–865.

Frazier, P., Tennen, H., Gavian, M., Park, C., Tomich, P. and Tashiro, T. (2009) 'Does self-reported posttraumatic growth reflect genuine positive change?', *Psychological Science*, 20(7), pp. 912–919.

Hershfield, H.E., Goldstein, D.G., Sharpe, W.F., Fox, J., Yeykelis, L., Carstensen, L.L. and Bailenson, J.N. (2011) 'Increasing saving behavior through age-progressed renderings of the future self', *Journal of Marketing Research*, 48(SPL), pp. S23–S37.

Ibarra, H. and Barbulescu, R. (2010) 'Identity as narrative: Prevalence, effectiveness, and consequences of narrative identity work in macro work role transitions', *Academy of Management Review*, 35(1), pp. 135–154.

Infurna, F.J. and Jayawickreme, E. (2019) 'Fixing the growth illusion: New directions for research in resilience and posttraumatic growth', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 28(2), pp. 152–158.

International Coach Federation (2020) *ICF Code of Ethics*. Lexington, KY: International Coach Federation.

Joinson, A.N. (2001) 'Self-disclosure in computer-mediated communication: The role of self-awareness and visual anonymity', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 31(2), pp. 177–192.

Kappes, H.B. and Oettingen, G. (2011) 'Positive fantasies about idealized futures sap energy', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 47(4), pp. 719–729.

King, L.A. (2001) 'The health benefits of writing about life goals', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27(7), pp. 798–807.

Lally, P. and Gardner, B. (2013) 'Promoting habit formation', *Health Psychology Review*, 7(S1), pp. S137–S158.

Markus, H. and Nurius, P. (1986) 'Possible selves', *American Psychologist*, 41(9), pp. 954–969.

McAdams, D.P. (2001) 'The psychology of life stories', *Review of General Psychology*, 5(2), pp. 100–122.

McAdams, D.P., Diamond, A., de St. Aubin, E. and Mansfield, E. (1997) 'Stories of commitment: The psychosocial construction of generative lives', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72(3), pp. 678–694.

McAdams, D.P. and McLean, K.C. (2013) 'Narrative identity', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22(3), pp. 233–238.

McLean, K.C. and Pratt, M.W. (2006) 'Life's little (and big) lessons: Identity statuses and meaning-making in the transition to adulthood', *Developmental Psychology*, 42(4), pp. 714–722.

McLean, K.C. and Syed, M. (2015) 'Personal, master, and alternative narratives: An integrative framework for understanding identity development in context', *Human Development*, 58, pp. 318–349.

Oettingen, G. and Mayer, D. (2002) 'The motivating function of thinking about the future: Expectations versus fantasies', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(5), pp. 1198–1212.

Oyserman, D., Bybee, D. and Terry, K. (2006) 'Possible selves and academic outcomes: How and when possible selves impel action', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91(1), pp. 188–204.

Pennebaker, J.W. and Beall, S.K. (1986) 'Confronting a traumatic event: Toward an understanding of inhibition and disease', *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 95(3), pp. 274–281.

Peterson, C. and Seligman, M.E.P. (2004) *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pinquart, M. and Forstmeier, S. (2012) 'Effects of reminiscence interventions on psychosocial outcomes: A meta-analysis', *Aging & Mental Health*, 16(5), pp. 541–558.

Reinhold, M., Bürkner, P.-C. and Holling, H. (2018) 'Effects of expressive writing on depressive symptoms — A meta-analysis', *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 25, e12224.

Singh, B., Murphy, A., Maher, C. and Smith, A.E. (2024) 'Time to form a habit: a systematic review and meta-analysis of health habit formation and its determinants', *Healthcare*, 12(23), 2488.

Stelter, R. and Law, H. (2010) 'Coaching — Narrative-collaborative practice', *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 5(2), pp. 152–164.

Stelter, R., Nielsen, G. and Wikman, J.M. (2011) 'Narrative-collaborative group coaching develops social capital — A randomised control trial of a group intervention', *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 4(2), pp. 123–137.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014) *SAMHSA's concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach*. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14–4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Suler, J. (2004) 'The online disinhibition effect', *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 7(3), pp. 321–326.

Theeboom, T., Beersma, B. and van Vianen, A.E.M. (2014) 'Does coaching work? A meta-analysis on the effects of coaching on individual level outcomes in an organizational context', *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 9(1), pp. 1–18.

Verplanken, B. and Roy, D. (2016) 'Empowering interventions to promote sustainable lifestyles: Testing the habit discontinuity hypothesis in a field experiment', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 45, pp. 127–134.

White, M. and Epston, D. (1990) *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Infinitum Leadership — End performing. Choose becoming. This white paper accompanies Write Your Story, the final instrument in the Choose Becoming sequence, and will be revised as the program's evaluation record develops.

infinitum LEADERSHIP

Put the evidence to work

Write Your Story is reached inside a Choose Becoming engagement, as the sequence's final instrument. Leaders in transition, and the HR partners who sponsor them, are invited to a discovery conversation before any engagement is proposed.

Start with a conversation

Book a discovery call to discuss coaching, the Choose Becoming program, or work with your team. infinitumleadership.com

Read more of the evidence

Infinitum's white papers and research summaries are collected on the Evidence page. infinitumleadership.com/evidence

Jonathan Evans, MA, PCC, MCS
Executive and Leadership Coach, Infinitum Leadership
jonathan@infinitumleadership.com